**Ram Dass Nomination Essay**

**Templeton Prize**

**Templeton Prize Office**

**Canyon Institute for Advanced Studies**

**3300 West Cameback Road**

**Phoenix, Arizona 85017**

**USA**

***July 1, 2002***

**Ram Dass**

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Nominee for the Templeton Prize

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**Introduction:**

Ram Dass’s contribution to the growth of spirituality is momentous. He has synthesized Eastern and Western spiritual perspectives. He teaches that a spiritual life is lived through the power of compassion in action. He has taught millions from the 60s through today that discovering and identifying with inner divinity produces the desire to serve each other and the world. His life is a living example of a spiritual transformation that has become a template for emulation: insatiably curious about God, humble, and productive. And his example is steadfast even in the face of a devastating stroke; Ram Dass is the living embodiment of how a deep spiritual life and adversity can coincide. His life has taught us to love each other, serve each other and to remember God. In a culture of rampant materialism and shallow consumerism; Ram Dass is the light of spiritual reason and deserves the Templeton Prize for his life long accomplishments.

**What has this person done that was entirely original?**

The following essay describes how Ram Dass’ work is entirely original in bringing the East and West together for a lay audience of spiritual seekers. He did this through publications like the *Be Here Now*; by living a life of compassion in action through good works; through a lifetime of vibrant teaching; and by being a living example of how the adversity of illness and aging can be used to further a deep and rewarding spiritual life.

**Was this contribution primarily spiritual rather than primarily humanitarian?**

Both. The unique quality of Ram Dass’ teachingis the unification of the spiritual with the humanitarian. For Ram Dass the opening of the heart naturally brings with it the spiritual obligation to alleviate suffering. Love, serve, and remember God is the Ram Dass creed. His founding work with the Seva Foundation is a perfect example.

**Did this unique contribution result in an appreciable acceleration in spiritual discoveries?**

Yes. Ram Dass’ spiritual evolution covers a great deal of territory. From a doctorate in Psychology and teaching at Harvard and Stanford; to the shamanistic-like exploration of the inner psyche with psychedelics; to the transformation from exploratory therapies to a formal study of meditation and yoga; to teaching how God, service and compassion are inextricably linked; to exploring the spiritual frontiers of illness and aging and the spiritual life. Millions of people among the laity would never have been exposed to these principles had Ram Dass not boldly explored these realms. His story has become our story, a life to emulate.

**Bullets:**

• He led a generation out of self absorption to the understanding that the hallmark of a spiritual life is service.

• Pioneered the work of compassionate care of the dying.

• Pioneered the work of spiritual practice in prison systems: the Prison-Ashram Project.

• Pioneered the search for a spiritual intelligence more embracing than the intellect.

• Brought respect and tolerance to traditional paths in his writings, lectures and example.

• Brought spiritual ethics to the Board Rooms of corporations through his work with the Social Venture Network and the Tides Foundation.

• Was one of the very first to pragmatically unify the two worlds of Western psychology and Eastern spiritual wisdom.

• Is a model, especially since his stroke, of how suffering can be used for spiritual practice to open the mind and heart.

• He built a bridge between cultures and generations of people who came to love India and cherish its traditions through his example. Now more than ever we need that kind of respect for other cultures.

• He has fostered interfaith dialogue for decades interpreted the life experiences for an entire generation in spiritual terms.

• Connected an entire generation to God, outside of an organized religion.

• Placed service in a spiritual context so that it is a spiritual as well as a humanitarian undertaking.

• Today there are estimates of 45 million Cultural Creatives—the largest adult block in the US---whose spiritual lives are largely outside of organized religions and Ram Dass is one of the principal advocates.

• He has uniquely led millions not away from drugs but through drugs and beyond to a deeper spirituality.

• The huge increase in book sales on spirituality is evidence of the lay spirituality movement, of which he is the number one teacher.

• His writing and understanding paved the way for the whole field of consciousness studies, which has become an intellectual and scientific door into spirituality, and has legitimated spirituality for many others

**Essay:**[[1]](#footnote-1)

Ram Dass has dedicated his life to the exploration of the divine and communicating those discoveries back to the public in easily understood terms. He relativized and unified Eastern and Western practices for lay practitioners, bringing the spiritual teachings of the East and united them with the most profound truths of the West. He has claimed no special privilege or honors, teaches the way to know God is through service, and by leading by example. Ram Dass has infiltrated the hearts of millions, leading them to profound understandings of spirituality by translating his journey into a workable spiritual practice for seekers to follow.

Ram Dass more than anyone else out of the sixties generation, has been instrumental in establishing what His holiness the Dalai Lama refers to as *a lay spirituality*. A whole generation of Americans from the 50's and 60's became disenchanted with the traditional religions, yet never lost interest in spirituality. Ram Dass has been a magnificent and trusted guide and interpreter as they progressed through the use of psychedelics, interest in eastern religions, service to our fellow men/women, and now illness and death.

Ram Dass has been a lay priest for millions as he guides them on spiritual journeys. His message has always been one of inclusively and of wholeness. His has been an experientially based spirituality that links the inner life and the outer life, always allowing each to enrich the other. As the traditional churches have become more removed from the meaning of the lives of many, Ram Dass has lived along side of us and his spirituality has incorporated our reality as no other living spiritual leader today.

For someone who has grown in evolution to the point that she or he understands that this precious birth is an opportunity to awaken, is an opportunity to know [that] all of life becomes an instrument for getting there: marriage, family, job, play, travel, all of it. You spiritualize your life.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Ram Dass made a spiritual life intrinsically interesting again. He is an original spiritual teacher, philosopher and ethnographer, who has led large numbers to seek formal religious paths. Film Biographer Michael Lemle writes:

Several years ago, Ram Dass was in the old city of Jerusalem, waking across the main plaza toward the Wailing Wall. A young Hassid walked by, looked up at him and as they passed, he asked, “Are you Ram Dass?” Ram Dass said he was. “I want to thank you for Be Here Now,” the Hassid said. “Your book started me on my spiritual journey, which has ended up here in Jerusalem as a Hassidic Rabbi.”

Ram Dass had just come from Thailand, where in a Buddhist monastery a Buddhist monk, who was a westerner came up to him and said, “Your Be Here Now started me on my spiritual journey, which has ended up here as a Buddhist monk.”

Ram Dass hears this all the time, all over the world: in Benedictine monasteries in France, in New Age communities in Hawaii and Oregon, and in ashrams in India. Ram Dass is a threshold person. He opens people up to an awareness of their inner lives. For many, he becomes a doorway to God.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Ram Dass is a spiritual populist. He is an active proponent of service as a means of spiritual practice motivating millions to roll up their sleeves and make the world a better place. He popularized these concepts through publications, lectures, videos, retreats, and by being a living example of the ideals he taught.

He doesn’t proselytize, he does not push. He speaks with great honesty and humor about his own journey, his own discoveries and how living on the plane of spirit and soul affects his life. He openly talks about how through meeting his own teacher, Neem Karoli Baba, he was transformed from a neurotic, arrogant, Jewish Harvard professor, into someone who has opened up millions of hearts around the world, and started millions more on their own spiritual path.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Ram Dass, *importantly for his consideration for the Templeton Prize*, has taught outside of academics and many formal religious settings. His work is not as easily measured as compared to some of the past academic recipients. His compassionate social action has been in the trenches, by the beds of the dying, in prisons, hospitals, living rooms, business board rooms, politician’s offices as well as the temples and churches of the world. Ram Dass has made an enormous impact, creating a domino effect from his transformational touch that spiritual growth coincides with helping others.

**Teachings[[5]](#footnote-5) and Practices**

Ram Dass’s teachings become evident through a study of his biography. After studying at Stanford and receiving his Ph.D., he taught at Harvard and studied the nature of consciousness via psychedelics with colleagues Timothy Leary and Ralph Metzner. After leaving Harvard, he pursued studies in consciousness in India where he met his guru Neem Karoli Baba. These high level experiences led him to pursue practices that allowed him to maintain consciousness expansion without psychedelics through meditation and service.

I’ve always gone through experiences and then shared my wisdom about them. That’s been my role. I was part of the “advance scouting party” for the psychedelic movement in the Sixties. I was part of the advance guard in the Seventies for people who were opening to Eastern religions. In the eighties, I explored the ways we might use karma-yoga, as a spiritual practice—a practice that is more available to us Westerners than monastic life or other traditional methods might be. In the nineties, as a kind of uncle to the baby boomers, being a little older than they are, I’ve been leading the way into an experience that lies ahead for most of us—the experience of aging. In the nineties, the stroke is the learning experience that I have to share.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Ram Dass has practiced many forms of yoga and meditation.[[7]](#footnote-7) In India, he traveled and studied many types of Hindu and Buddhist meditation and yoga. He studied Raja Yoga, or Ashtanga yoga, with Hari Dass Baba.[[8]](#footnote-8) He also practiced mantra, Hatha yoga, Pranayam, breathing techniques, and Bhakti yoga-—the yoga of love.

Ram Dass adopted a spiritual practice emphasizing nondualism, where the multiple perceptions of reality are relavitized and the divine self was acknowledged as the inner witness of the ego and all of its permutations.

It’s a journey that has taken us from primary identification with our body, through identification with our psyche, on to identification with our souls, then to identification with God, and ultimately beyond identification.[[9]](#footnote-9)

The “witness” consciousness, or soul consciousness, is the perception that the self is beyond the body, mind and ego identification with itself and its place in the world. To perceive from the point of view of the witness is to *be here now*, to be present in the moment. Mindfulness is being fully aware of the present moment.

In learning to step outside the ego, into soul consciousness, we know that we are more than our thoughts and feelings and the mind that experiences them.[[10]](#footnote-10)

In mindfulness, you are aware of what happens in each moment. You remain alert, not allowing yourself to become forgetful. When you develop mindfulness and concentration together, you achieve a balance of mind. As this penetrating awareness develops it reveals many aspects of the world and of who you are. You see with a clear and direct vision that everything, including yourself, is flowing, in flux, in transformation. There is not a single element of your mind or body that is stable. This wisdom comes not from any particular state, but from close observation of you own mind.”[[11]](#footnote-11)

Ram Dass posits that this knowledge can be purely academic. Without some form of meditative practice, *being here now*, any consistent retention of a higher state of consciousness is lost. He advocates a meditative practice based on contemplation *and* a life of service as the tag team of spiritual awareness. To sustain authentic spirituality we must practice this method on a continuous basis to rest in the witness regularly. Meditation dislodges the ego and its attachments by witnessing: what was subjective, become objective and internal detachment increases through time. Consistent practice allows the individual to make spiritual progress.

The meditative awareness is not one of intellectual analysis nor one of labeling different takes on reality. It allows all ways of seeing, to exist in the space surrounding an event. Meditative awareness has a clarity that lays bare both the workings of your mind and the other forces at work in a situation. This clarity allows you to see the factors that determine your choices from moment to moment. Yet you don’t have to think about it to grasp all this. You find that you know, you understand. In this inner stillness and clarity you are fully aware of the entire gestalt, the whole picture.[[12]](#footnote-12)

The core strength of Ram Dass’s teaching, the reason he deserves the Templeton Prize, is *his transformation of yogic practice into a life a service*. He made his life meditation-in-action to stay in the moment does not mean a life spent sitting on a meditation cushion.

The final step in integrating meditation into your awareness is to use the stuff of daily life as part of meditation. There are ways of perceiving the world and the way that you live in it such that every experience brings you more deeply into meditative space. At the same time, however, this kind of meditation requires firm grounding; you must continue to function effectively in the world as you meditate on it. This is meditation-in-action. It finally becomes the core of a consciously led life, a meditative space within you. This space stands between each thing you notice and each response you make, allowing a peaceful, quite, and spacious view of the universe. . . Your every act becomes a meditation on your relation to God.[[13]](#footnote-13)

To know God, one has to serve God. His practice is karma yoga, using everything in life as the spiritual path. Through the practice of karma yoga, compassion blossoms. In one of the memorable encounters with his guru, Ram Dass sums up the teaching.

Eventually all Maharaji’s messages started to get through to me. . ”Be like Gandhi. . . Your name is Ram Dass [Serve God]. . . Do your duty in the world as a way of serving God. . . Feed everyone. . . Serve everyone.” Maharaji was telling me, whether I liked it or not, that my path was karma-yoga, and that the specific actions were to be those of service.” [[14]](#footnote-14)

The result of a sincere meditative practice based on service is compassion. Compassion is the natural result of living a life connected to higher realms of reality and diminished attachments of ego. “Compassionate action is not done for others-—it is done with others, for ourselves, because we can no longer avoid it. It helps fulfill our lives.”[[15]](#footnote-15) As the practice bares fruit, expanded consciousness begins to identify with the world subjectively. God is everywhere, merging with God initiates a sense of stewardship and ownership for the surrounding world. Treating it with compassion, with love and from the heart is no longer a choice.

As I open to the love in my heart for fellow human beings—-including the earth-—and to my own interdependence and, indeed, identity with all beings, the yearning to become an instrument for the relief of all suffering grows stronger. Over time, the link between my spiritual growth and the possibility of becoming such an instrument has become clear to me. As a result of my inner work, barriers have fallen away, allowing me access to sources of deeper compassion in myself. And out of this deeper compassion have come actions that are more effective in relieving suffering.[[16]](#footnote-16)

The key to this compassion is *action*. Ram Dass does not just want to do it; he does it. It does no one any good to just know something; they must embody that knowledge.[[17]](#footnote-17)

**Service**

His work as a founder of the Seva Foundation is a prime example.The mission of the Seva Foundation is: “Seva builds partnerships to respond to locally defined problems with culturally sustainable solutions.” The Seva Foundation seeks long term solutions to health, economic and development problems in a number of countries around the world. The Seva Foundation is typical of the nature of dedicated involvement and the fully involved approach Ram Dass takes when he works toward a solution (please see appendices of affiliations with web sites).[[18]](#footnote-18) To elucidate, I quote in full Seva Executive Director James O’Dea’s support letter:

Ram Dass has been heralded as one of the most influential spiritual leaders of his generation in America. His books, his public life and spiritual teaching have been well documented in countless articles and interviews over a quarter of a century. Recently, a biographical movie has been made about him.

What I will address here is 25 years of service to an organization he helped found. Seva is a Sanskrit word for service and its own accomplishments have been of a high standard: it has worked in the field of international health and development and has been a leader in new approaches to blindness prevention and sight restoration in Tibet, Nepal, India and, now, Cambodia; it has worked in Native American health and cultural survival and on Mayan cultural and communal renewal.

What sets Seva apart is its approach to international health and development work: it is the opposite of the hit and run approach, building long-term partnerships to collaborate over decades to solve problems and promote sustainable solutions. Ram Dass from the very first meeting insisted that truly lasting initiatives must be rooted in deep relationships between people that affirm spiritual purpose and that are dialogic and inter-cultural in approach. The partnership with Aravind eye hospital, now the world’s largest eye hospital, from a fifteen bed clinic is one in which deep spiritual affirmation of service; partnerships of lasting integrity and a spirit of collaboration exemplify the kind of approach that Ram Dass cultivated.

He worked hard to make the Board a community in spiritual service together. The Seva Board spent time in spiritual retreat and in deep dialogue about the relationship between inner life and social action. It saw early the vital continuity between inner life, consciousness and the quality of relationships with social transformation and effective and sustainable development assistance. Ram Dass guided a community in the work of linking the realm of being with the realm of doing. An activism which was only concerned with doing would burn itself out but linked with deep access to and nurturing of the depth realm of being it would connect to miraculous well-springs of compassion in action.

In helping to build an organization that really walked its talk and that was sustained by long-term vision rather than the immediate ego gratifications of success Ram Dass began to articulate this vision of the path of service to a new generation of Americans. In numerous high-profile lecture tours throughout the United States in the 80’s to mid-90’s he inspired a whole generation to do service and go inside to connect with spirit as the primary resource for their work in the world.

He fundraised, he lectured, he modeled the principles of karma yoga in his own countless acts of service, and he nurtured his colleagues in the Seva Foundation in work that matched inner process with effective and measurable results in its work in the world.

Today Seva has been recognized as an organization which has a reach way beyond its rather, relatively speaking, small size. The words used to describe it are “wholeness of vision and praxis”, “a model of effective international partnership and collaboration”, “one of the groups that is quietly building global community while others talk about it.”

Ram Dass knew that an organization that would seek to serve others with authenticity must be prepared to do its own human homework and must itself be, in his own words, “a temple of service.”

James O’Dea

Executive Director

A second example of Ram Dass’ putting compassion into action is the Social Venture Network (SVN). The SVN promotes socially responsible entrepreneurship and investment, it is a nonprofit network committed to building a just and sustainable world through business. Ram Dass sought to bring business and compassionate action together:

Too much of today's business and economic activity operates at the expense of our biosphere and future generations. We believe in a new bottom line for business, one that values healthy communities and the human spirit as well as high returns. SVN members are a part of an expanding global network of pioneering entrepreneurs who share this vision and are helping to transform the way the world does business.[[19]](#footnote-19)

This devotional, service-oriented, spiritual practice, the work with prisoners, with the dying, with helping and community building, working with the wealthy to better stewards is the yoga Ram Dass gives to us.[[20]](#footnote-20)

**Aging**

In 1997 Ram Dass suffered a devastating stroke.

For the first two months after suffering a massive stroke in 1997, it was unclear whether or not Ram Dass would live. He couldn’t speak, nor eat, nor swallow. There were tubes going in and out of his body. The doctors told his close friends that he was either going to die or be a vegetable – that he was never going to improve. For weeks Ram Dass hovered on the point between life and death. One day, a close friend who had visited Ram Dass on a daily basis, came into the hospital room and knew Ram Dass wanted to live. The remarkable progress he has made since then began that day. Ram Dass had decided that he was going to come back from the brink of death and go through the immense pain, discomfort and inconvenience of living with the effects of a massive stroke – paralyzed on his right side, in a wheelchair, with speech aphasia – to go through the process and tell the rest of us about it, so that millions of us will be able to approach our own aging and death with less fear.

Like everything else that has come into his life since meeting his guru, Ram Dass has used the stroke as a way to get closer to God. By telling the rest of us about this part of his journey through public appearances, lectures, workshops, retreats, tapes . . . he is helping millions once again.[[21]](#footnote-21)

One of Ram Dass’ most powerful traits is his ability to covey his own failures. He realizes his own shortcomings, and transmits the wisdom that those following a spiritual life grow more with each passing day. Sometimes pain is part of growth. In Still Here, he examines the aging process, and attempts to explain how one can use the body’s aging process to progress toward God. By retaining a soul perspective, the physical can be put into the proper light, where it does the most amounts of good for the soul.

That’s the goal, balancing inner and outer. You’re part of society, you’re part of a family, you’re part of all sorts of groups. Do what you must to meet your responsibilities, but do it as an exercise that furthers your own liberation as well. The true freedom of awareness that you seek is possible only when you acknowledge and fulfill honorably all aspects of the dance of life.[[22]](#footnote-22)

As always, Ram Dass is taking what life has presented and used it as a vehicle for teaching. As his generation comes into their “gray years” with the all the health and fear implications therein, he is using his stroke as a means to teach. As he ascends this path, he returns and teaches once again how all things, adversity included, lead to God.

**Conclusion**

Thus, Ram Dass is been a leader of the human potential movement. By cultivating his own soul-consciousness and then sharing this with others, he helps people to begin to transcend their ego and embrace a higher level of consciousness. In a postmodern society where culture is a thin veneer and ego entertainment and materialism are a major goal, Ram Dass’ infusion of common sense yoga and service refreshes those in search of depth in the West today.

He has and continued to provide a vital path to some of the most significant paths from the East and popularized them for seekers who would have lost without him. He has galvanized this path with his own example through thick and thin, and those who have tread his path have received magnificent results.

Ram Dass has defined a new yet ancient spiritual reality for the West and the world. His works are a resource of help. He has been prolific, wide ranging, and consistent in teaching others how to open their spiritual lives. He teaches love, tolerance, courage, inclusiveness with great joy and humor as well as courage and strength. His explicit acknowledgement of his own weakness and failings in the practice endeared him to thousands of listeners and students, who felt it easy to identify with someone with common human imperfections. He has changed Western spiritual landscape as no other person has. He has taken great risks, explored difficult and unknown territories, and today, as an elder, one who has exhibited tremendous courage and wit in the face of illness, he continues to give us all unstintingly his deep experience and wisdom.

**Biographical Vignette**

2

Michael Lemle writes:

Several years ago, Ram Dass was in the old city of Jerusalem, waking across the main plaza toward the Wailing Wall. A young Hassid walked by, looked up at him and as they passed, he asked, “Are you Ram Dass?” Ram Dass said he was. “I want to thank you for Be Here Now,” the Hassid said. “Your book started me on my spiritual journey, which has ended up here in Jerusalem as a Hassidic Rabbi.”

Ram Dass had just come from Thailand, where in a Buddhist monastery a Buddhist monk, who was a westerner came up to him and said, “Your Be Here Now started me on my spiritual journey, which has ended up here as a Buddhist monk.”

Ram Dass hears this all the time, all over the world: in Benedictine monasteries in France, in New Age communities in Hawaii and Oregon, and in ashrams in India. *Ram Dass is a threshold person*. He opens people up to an awareness of their inner lives. For many, he becomes a doorway to God.

What is unique about Ram Dass is that he does not prescribe a set method for people. Unlike many gurus or religious or spiritual leaders, he does not tell people: “Be like me. Dress like me. Do the practices I do. Believe what I believe. It is the true way.” Rather, he opens people to the living spirit within themselves and lets them find their own path and their own practice.

He doesn’t proselytize, he does not push. He speaks with great honesty and humor about his own journey, his own discoveries and how living on the plane of spirit and soul affects his life. He openly talks about how through meeting his own teacher, Neem Karoli Baba, he was transformed from a neurotic, arrogant, Jewish Harvard professor, into someone who has opened up millions of hearts around the world, and started millions more on their own spiritual path.

One of his basic messages is that we are at once human and divine and we must honor both of those realities in our lives. “If you go too far into your humanness,” he tells people, “you are going to suffer; because life in an incarnation is suffering: You get sick, people close to you die, you die. On the other hand, if you go too far in the direction of your divinity, you run the risk of forgetting your zip code and that can be problematic.”

At one point in the early Seventies, he had the opportunity to meet with his teacher, his guru, alone. He asked him, “How can I get enlightened?” The guru said, “Feed people!” Ram Dass thought that something might have gotten lost in the translation. “How can I get free?” Ram Dass asked. “Serve people,” Neem Karoli Baba answered.

Ram Dass came back from India and was one of the founding members of The Seva Foundation. He has written several books about service as a spiritual path and he has lived that path. For decades he has worked with people who were dying, homeless, in prison, anyone who is suffering. He asks nothing for his service. He feeds people and serves them.

For the first two months after suffering a massive stroke in 1997, it was unclear whether or not Ram Dass would live. He couldn’t speak, nor eat, nor swallow. There were tubes going in and out of his body. The doctors told his close friends that he was either going to die or be a vegetable – that he was never going to improve. For weeks Ram Dass hovered on the point between life and death. One day, a close friend who had visited Ram Dass on a daily basis, came into the hospital room and knew Ram Dass wanted to live. The remarkable progress he has made since then began that day. Ram Dass had decided that he was going to come back from the brink of death and go through the immense pain, discomfort and inconvenience of living with the effects of a massive stroke – paralyzed on his right side, in a wheelchair, with speech aphasia – to go through the process and tell the rest of us about it, so that millions of us will be able to approach our own aging and death with less fear.

Like everything else that has come into his life since meeting his guru, Ram Dass has used the stroke as a way to get closer to God. By telling the rest of us about this part of his journey through public appearances, lectures, workshops, retreats, tapes, his latest book STILL HERE: Embracing Aging, Changing and Dying, and by allowing it all to be captured in a new feature film, *RAM DASS* FIERCE GRACE, he is helping millions once again.

In the Buddhist tradition, those beings that come back to help others so that they can become enlightened are called Bodhisattvas. Perhaps, Ram Dass is a true Bodhisattva. This is not for us to decide. What we can say is that he is certainly a being who is a true example of all that The Templeton Award honors.

3

**Biography**:

4

Richard Alpert (aka Ram Dass) was born in 1931. His father, George, a lawyer, helped to found Brandeis University and was President of the New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad. Ram Dass studied psychology, specializing in human motivation and personality development. He received an M.A. from Wesleyan and a Ph.D. from Stanford. He then served on the psychology faculties at Stanford and the University of California and from 1958 to 1963 taught and researched in the Department of Social Relations and the Graduate School of Education at Harvard University. During this period he co-authored (with Sears and Rau) the book ***Identification and Child Rearing***, published by Stanford University Press.

In 1961, while at Harvard, Ram Dass' explorations of human consciousness led him, in collaboration with Timothy Leary, Ralph Metzner, Aldous Huxley, Allen Ginsberg, and others, to pursue intensive research with psilocybin, LSD-25, and other psychedelic chemicals. Out of this research came two books: ***The Psychedelic Experience*** (co-authored by Leary and Metzner, and based on ***The Tibetan Book of the Dead***, published by University Books); and ***LSD*** (with Sidney Cohen and Lawrence Schiller, published by New American Library). Because of the controversial nature of this research, Ram Dass was dismissed from Harvard in 1963.

Ram Dass continued his research under the auspices of a private foundation until 1967. In that year he traveled to India, where he met his Guru (spiritual teacher), Neem Karoli Baba. Ram Dass studied yoga and meditation, and received the name Ram Dass, which means "servant of God." Since 1968, he has pursued a variety of spiritual practices, including guru kripa; devotional yoga focused on the Hindu spiritual figure Hanuman; meditation in the Theravadin, Mahayana Tibetan, and Zen Buddhist schools; karma yoga; and Sufi and Jewish studies.

Ram Dass’ interests include the support of psychedelic research, international development, environmental awareness, and political action. In 1974 he founded the Hanuman Foundation, an organization involved in various spiritual endeavors and social services. ***The Only Dance There Is*** was published during the 1974 (Anchor/Doubleday). In 1976 he wrote ***Grist for the Mill***. Also during the 1970’s he began the Prison Ashram Project and the Dying Project through the Hanuman Foundation. In 1978 he helped found the Seva Foundation. In 1979 ***Miracle of Love: Stories of Neem Karoli Baba*** (Hanuman Foundation) was published.

Throughout the 1980s RD continued with the work that was begun in the 1970s. He has written a number of spiritual books including ***Be Here Now***, published in 1971 (over one million copies sold, 37th printing, Crown Publishers); co-authored ***How Can I Help?*** (with Paul Gorman, Knopf)in 1985. In 1990 he wrote ***Journey of Awakening*** (Bantam Books); and in 1992, ***Compassion in Action: Setting Out on the Path of Service*** (with Mirabai Bush, Bell Tower Press). In 1997 he suffered a stroke, which left him partially paralyzed. Three years later, in 2000, he published ***Still Here: Embracing Aging, Changing and Dying*** (Riverhead). Currently, RD is recovering well, on tour lecturing (see lecture schedule below).

**Teaching Topics**

5

Aging and Dying

Bringing aging out of the closet

Conscious aging

Business and Right Livelihood

Finding balance in business

Business and dharma

What is winning?

Conscious Living and Social Awareness

Embodying spirit

Cultural contexts and spiritual journeys

Inner and outer worlds

Models of mind

Paradox and balance

Psychotherapy and awareness

Social Responsibility

Death and Dying

Being with Dying

Changing

Death is not an Outrage

Exploring the heart of healing in AIDS

Perspectives on Death

Preparing for Death

Three phases of Dying

Universe of Compassion

Valuing Death: the roles of Palliative Care

Varanasi West: Environments to Die In

Devotion and Guru

Guru Kripa

Heart of Devotion

Maharajji’s Darshan

Opening to the Infinite

Ecological and Political Reflections

Awakening the Seeing Heart

Consciousness and Current Events

Environmental Crisis

Social Action

Inner Work and Healing

Daily Life as Sadhana

Dance of Forms

Dying into Life

Experiments in Truth

Heart of the Matter

Helping Ourselves Heal Others

Here and Now

Journey: The Transformation

Listening Heart

Presence of God

Silence is the Doorway

Skillful Means for Conscious Living

Texture of Silence

Universe of Compassion

Judaism

A Covenant with God: Judaism and Spirituality

Karma Yoga and the Path of Service

Change of Heart

Compassion in Action

How Can I Help?

Making Life Sacred

On Being With What Is

Serve the Beloved

Spirit of Service

Meditation and Practices

Journey of Awakening

Karma

Kirtan/Chanting

Malas and Mantras

Mantra Meditation

Meditation Practices

One Track Heart

Pranayam

Shiva Puja

Spiritual Perspectives for Daily Life

Tibetian Dzogchen, Vipassana Practices

Tuning to the Wisdom of the Heart

Visualization Meditation

Metaphysics and the Nature of Reality

Yogas of the Bhagavad Gita

Context and Conflict

Karma and Reincarnation

Karma Yoga

Karma and Jnana Yogas

Jnana Yoga

Brahman

Sacrifice and Mantra

Renunciation and Purification

Devotion and the Guru

Social Aspects of Sadhana

Dying

Personality and Relationships

Adult Children and their Parents

Attachment and Addiction

Conscious Loving and Conscious Parenting

Creating Conscious Community

Ego and Soul

Gay Identity

Generosity of the Heart

Personality and Emotions: Fear, Anger and Love

Sex and Spirituality

The Yoga of Relationship

Sacred Texts

The Ramayana

The Yogas of the Bhagavad Gita

Suffering as Grace

Heavy Grace: After Stroke

Paradox: To be free of suffering we must embrace it

**Ram Das’ Books**

6

***Identification and Child Rearing*** with R. Sears and L. Rau (Stanford University Press – date unknown [early ‘60s])

***The Psychedelic Experience*** with Timothy Leary and Ralph Metzner (University Books, 1964)

***LSD*** with S. Cohen and L. Shiller (New American Library – date unknown [mid-‘60s])

***Be Here Now*** (Lama Foundation, later Crown Books – 1971)

***The Only Dance There Is*** (Anchor Books, 1974)

***Grist for the Mill*** with Stephen Levine (Unity Press, 1976; new edition by Celestial Arts, 1987)

***Journey of Awakening*** (Bantam Books, 1978)

***Miracle of Love*** (Dutton, 1979; new edition by Hanuman Foundation, 1996)

***How Can I Help?*** with Paul Gorman (Alfred Knopf, 1985)

***Compassion in Action*** with Mirabai Bush (Bell Tower, 1992)

***Still Here: Embracing Aging, Changing and Dying*** (Riverhead Books, 2000)

**List of Affiliations**

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**Children: Our Ultimate Investment**

P. O. Box 1868

Los Angeles, CA 90028

www.children-ourinvestment.org.

Supports various programs to help children. Founded by Laura Huxley

Board Member

**Compassion in Dying**

6312 S.W. Capitol Highway

Portland, OR 97201

www.compassionindying.org

503-221-9556

Fax 503-228-9160

Advocates for humane dying

Advisory Board

**Creating Our Future**

421 Sybil Avenue,

San Leandro, CA 94577.

Promotes the development of a community of social action from a spiritual perspective.

Board Member

**Further Foundation**

1782 Fifth Street,

Berkeley, CA 94710

www.further.org

Environmental and social projects in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Board Member.

**George Mark Children’s House**

2201 Broadway

Suite 308

Oakland, CA 94612

(510) 451-1999 phone

(510) 451-0673 fax

www.georgemark.org

A hospice for children with AIDS. Deanna Dechaine: Executive Director.

Advisory Council

**Lama Foundation**

P. O. Box 240

San Cristobal, NM 87564

www.lamafoundation.org.

505 758-8622

Fax 505 758-8648

Founding members of this international spiritual community.

**Neem Karoli Baba Ashram/Hanuman Temple**

Box W Taos

NM, 87571

The ashram is the central gathering place for Neem Karoli Baba’s satsang in the US.

Board Member

**Seva Foundation**

1786 Fifth Street

Berkeley, CA 94710

510/ 845-7382

Fax: 510/ 845-7410

www.seva.org.

Founding members of the organization focused on health care (especially blindness) in developing countries. James O’Dea Executive Director: Larry Brilliant

Advisory Board, Past Board Member

**Social Venture Network**

P. O. Box 29221

San Francisco, CA 94129

www.svn.org.

415-561-6501

415-561-6435 Fax:

Organization of entrepreneurs seeking to foster social responsibility in the business community

Past Board Member

**Threshold Foundation**

P. O. Box 29903

San Francisco, CA 94129

www.thresholdfoundation.org.

Threshold is a community of individuals united through wealth and a progressive foundation mobilizing money, people and power to create a more just, joyful and sustainable world. Suzanne Brown

Member and advisor

**Tides Foundation**

Presidio Building #1014

San Francisco, CA 94129

www.tidesfoundation.org.

415.561.6400

415.561.6401 Fax

Foundation works with wealthy donors committed to positive social change.

Past Advisor

**Zen Hospice Project/Institute on Dying**

273 Page Street

San Francisco, CA 94102

www.zenhospice.org.

Trains “midwives for the dying.” Frank Ostaseski

Board Member

**Ram Dass’ 2002**

**Lecture Schedule**

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January 13, 2002 San Rafael, CA: Sunday Satsang at Open Secret Bookstore.

February 3, 2002 San Rafael, CA: Sunday Satsang at Open Secret Bookstore, with Ram Dass and Krishna Das.

February 22, 2002 San Rafael, CA: “Opening Night” benefit of “Fierce Grace,” the film about Ram Dass. A screening of the film will be followed by a discussion with Ram Dass and filmmaker Mickey Lemle.

February 24, 2002 San Rafael, CA: Sunday Satsang at Open Secret Bookstore, with Ram Dass, Jai Uttal, and Geoffrey Gordon.

February 27-March 12, 2002 New York, NY: Screening of “Fierce Grace” at the New York Film Forum.

March 10, 2002 San Rafael, CA: Sunday Satsang at Open Secret Bookstore, with Ram Dass, Jai Uttal, and Geoffrey Gordon.

March 29-31, 2002 Monterey, CA: The Prophets Conference. The title of the conference is “Renewal.” Ram Dass will give a talk entitled “Suffering,”

April 12-14, 2002 Fierce Grace will be shown at the Sonoma Valley Film Festival. Ram Dass will be present at the screening to answer questions.

April 14, 2002 San Rafael, CA: Sunday Satsang at Open Secret Bookstore. Contact Open Secret, 415-457-4191.

April 20, 2002 Los Angeles, CA: An evening with Ram Dass and Jai Uttal, to benefit the Neem Karoli Baba Ashram.

April 27-28, 2002 Highland Park, IL: Ram Dass will be presented with the Infinity Foundation Spirit Award at a dinner on Saturday evening; he will give a talk at the awards dinner, and be present an afternoon-long workshop on Sunday.

May 12, 2002 San Rafael, CA: Sunday Satsang at Open Secret Bookstore.

May 17-19, 2002 Austin, TX: Omega Foundation conference entitled “The Heart of Happiness.” Omega Institute

May 24-27, 2002 Santa Cruz, CA: Creating Our Future weekend workshop.

June 2, 2002 Raleigh, NC: “Heart to Heart”: A day-long workshop with Ram Dass, Jai Uttal, and friends, to benefit the Neem Karoli Baba Ashram.

June 9, 2002 San Rafael, CA: Sunday Satsang at Open Secret Bookstore.

June 14, 2002 Vancouver, B.C., Canada: An evening program with Ram Dass and Jai Uttal sponsored by Banyan Books.

June 16-21, 2002 Cortes Island, B.C., Canada: A retreat at Hollyhock with Ram Dass, Jai Uttal, and Geoffrey Gordon. The title of the retreat is “Karma Yoga: Using Our Lives as a Path to God.”

July 12, 2002 Denver, CO: Lecture at Mile High Church. Contact Karen Thomas.

July 14, 2002 Oregon Country Fair: Ram Dass will be taking part in the Oregon Country Fair—a venerable hippie institution.

July 21, 2002 San Rafael, CA: Sunday Satsang at Open Secret Bookstore.

July 26 - August 2, 2002 Detroit, OR: Retreat at Breitenbush Hot Springs with Ram Dass and Krishna Das. The title of the retreat is “Approaching the Silence Within.”

August 2-11, 2002 Hopland, CA: Creating Our Future summer camp. Ram Dass will take part for a day or two during the camp.

August 3, 2002 Portland, OR: An evening with Ram Dass and Krishna Das.

August 11, 2002 Woodacre, CA: Zig Zag Zen: Psychedelics and Buddhism. Ram Dass will be part of a panel at an afternoon workshop at Spirit Rock Center.

August 18, 2002 San Rafael, CA: Sunday Satsang at Open Secret Bookstore.

September 16-20, 2002 Rhinebeck, NY: “Grist for the Mill: Living with Faith” – a retreat at Omega Institute with Ram Dass, Krishna Das, Ghelek Rimpoche, Ralph Metzner, Sharon Salzburg, and Paul Gorman. Omega Institute,

September 22, 2002 Santa Fe, NM: “Big Bhakti Bash,” a benefit for the Neem Karoli Baba Ashram, with Ram Dass, Krishna Das, Jai Uttal, and friends.

October 11, 2002 New York, NY: An evening with Krishna Das at Jivamukti.

October 13, 2002 Philadelphia, PA: “Heart to Heart”: A day-long workshop with Ram Dass, Krishna Das, and friends, to benefit the Neem Karoli Baba Ashram.

October 20, 2002 San Rafael, CA: Sunday Satsang at Open Secret Bookstore.

October 25, 2002 San Jose, CA: Ram Dass will present a lecture in the Center for Spiritual Enlightenment’s series, “What Love Has to Teach Us.”

November 1-4, 2002 Hollywood, FL: Omega conference.

November 17, 2002 San Rafael, CA: Sunday Satsang at Open Secret Bookstore.

November 22-24, 2002 Maui, HI: A weekend retreat with Ram Dass, Jai Uttal, and Geoffrey Gordon.

December 15, 2002 San Rafael, CA: Sunday Satsang at Open Secret Bookstore.

1. This essay has been kindly contributed to by Larry Brilliant, Wink Franklin, Joan Halifax, Michael Lemle, Sarah McCombs, Ralph Metzner, James O'Dea, Stephan Rechtschaffen, and Sharon Salzberg. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ram Dass, Grist For the Mill, 26 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Michael Lemle: see the biographical vignette in the appendices for full text. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Michael Lemle. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. **See full list of teaching topics in appendices.**  [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ram Dass, Still Here, 184 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. “Over the years I have drawn from a wide variety of spiritual and consciousness practices that have helped me to regain my balance. Because I delight in reason, I find useful practices in almost all religious traditions that call into play my intellectual facilities. But so too do I love the power and play of emotions of my emotions, so I find myself attracted to specific devotional practices that work with the heart. Similarly I find practices that work with my sensual, reflective, and energetic natures. I have, at one time or another been drawn to and grown from all of these practices.” Ram Dass, Compassion in Action, 134 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Ram Dass, Be Here Now, prologue, 36 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Ram Dass, Grist For the Mill, 17 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Ram Dass, Still Here, 147 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Ram Dass, Journey of Awakening, 87. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Ram Dass, Journey of Awakening, 24 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Ram Dass, Journey of Awakening, 92+93 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Ram Dass, Compassion in Action, 57 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Ram Dass, Compassion in Action, xii [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Ram Dass, Compassion in Action, 133 [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. “I want to be part of that network of compassion that brings the multitude of beings back to the One, to love, to consciousness, to all of it. I’d like to bring myself and everyone else to that Awareness—that’s always been my central purpose. The stroke took away a lot of ego distractions, and brought me back to my soul’s purpose.” Ram Dass, Still Here, 198 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. As listed in the affiliations Ram Dass is or has worked with the following including the Prison Ashram Project: Children: Our Ultimate Investment, Supports various programs to help children; Compassion in Dying, Advocates for humane dying; Creating Our Future, Promotes the development of a community of social action from a spiritual perspective; Further Foundation, Environmental and social projects in the San Francisco Bay Area; George Mark Children’s House, A hospice for children with AIDS; Lama Foundation, Founding members of this international spiritual community; Seva Foundation; Social Venture Network; Threshold Foundation**;** individuals united through wealth to mobilize money, people and power to create a more just, joyful and sustainable world; Tides Foundation, Foundation works with wealthy donors committed to positive social change; Zen Hospice Project/Institute on Dying, Trains “midwives for the dying. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. From the Social Venture Network web site. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. This is the essence of the devotional path is also deeply congruent with Ram Dass’s Jewish heritage: the heritage of applied, in-the-world spirituality that is focused on reducing social injustice; Or what Charlene Spretnak, in her book “Stated of Grace,” has called the “imperative of active, social concern” in the Semitic traditions. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Michael Lemle. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Ram Dass, Journey of Awakening, 189 [↑](#footnote-ref-22)